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**Article**

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## A Royal Correspondence in the XV<sup>th</sup> and XVI<sup>th</sup> Centuries: the Documents of the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe (Zana)\*

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In the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, Carlo Conti Rossini visited monastic communities in Ethiopia, especially in Tigre, where he was able to consult some manuscripts in monastic libraries and made copies of some of them. These copies are now stored in the Accademia dei Lincei at Rome, and Stefan Strelcyn described them for the catalogue of the library<sup>1</sup>. One manuscript from the Carlo Conti Rossini collection (manuscript n° 91 entitled “chronique royale, documents divers” by S. Strelcyn)<sup>2</sup> is a copy of some documents registered in a Gospel which came from Däbrä Kärbe of Zana in Tigre<sup>3</sup>.

This type of text raises many problems. As we know only the copy, not the original, we cannot estimate the date of the manuscript<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, even if Carlo Conti Rossini had given any information concerning the position in the Gospel manuscript of the different documents copied for him<sup>5</sup>, we could not tell exactly where they were located and we cannot examine

\* This paper was submitted at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa (2000), but unfortunately was not published in the proceedings. I would like to thank Daniel Assefa for his corrections of the translation from ge'ez and for his help and kindness at all times, and Michael Gervers who kindly corrected the English version. Of course, any mistakes and mistranslations are my own.

<sup>1</sup> S. STRELCYN, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> S. STRELCYN, 1976, 238–241.

<sup>3</sup> The location of Zana in Tigre can be deduced from two different sources. First, in the *Liber Axumae*, Zana appears in two acts. In these documents, the other place names are located in Tigre (C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1910, 34–35, 58). Secondly, in the *History of Labnä Dəngəl*, there is a short reference to Däbrä Kärbe of Zana which was destroyed by the armies of Grañ on January 1540, after Grañ had burnt Aksum (M. KROPP, 1988, 18; F.A. DOMBROWSKI, 1983, 166). F. A. Dombrowski proposes a geographical location (East of Ferfera, south of the Takkaze river and west of Gumalo, *ibid.* 344). Finally, we must point out that G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD (1965, 98) located Däbrä Kärbe 20 miles southwest from Aksum, which seems to be quite reliable according to the maps.

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Conti Rossini only says that the copy was made from an old Gospel (Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 2).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 76.

the handwriting. These reasons make the different texts more difficult to understand and so we can only submit some hypotheses here.

Four types of document were registered in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe:

- two letters written in the name of the king and the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* of Ḥayq: the first one dates from the reign of Zär’a Ya‘əqob, the second letter from the reign of Ləbnä Dəngäl<sup>6</sup>.
- the rules concerning the *däbtära* (*Šər‘atä Däbtära*) i.e. a re-partition of the *däbtära* in three groups for the service of *qəne*<sup>7</sup>.
- the donations of land to the monastery, with the assignment of their incomes for the celebration of the *täzkar* of the kings or the feast of Mary<sup>8</sup>.
- and finally, a text presented by Carlo Conti Rossini as a short history of Zär’a Ya‘əqob, without either beginning or end<sup>9</sup>. This text seemed to be meaningless because, in Carlo Conti Rossini’s copy, words were cut and the paragraphs were not linked together. However, the document is actually an extract from the *Mäṣḥafä Milad*, more precisely the lecture for *taḥśās* 29, which is a celebration of king Zär’a Ya‘əqob’s victory over Badlay at the battle of Gomit<sup>10</sup>. But this was not recognised at first, because the page sequence is arranged backward<sup>11</sup>. It is not known if this was already the case in the original Däbrä Kärbe Gospel or if the mistake was made by the copyist of Carlo Conti Rossini. The presence of this extract from the *Mäṣḥafä Milad* in the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel is very important because, according to Kurt Wendt, there is only one other copy of this text. It can be found in a manuscript preserved in the National Library in Paris, belonging to the d’Abbadie collection, coming from Daga Eṣṭifanos, and dating from the XVI<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. No other copy of this text has been discovered since then.

<sup>6</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 76–78, 96–99.

<sup>7</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 100–107.

<sup>8</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 96–99, 108–114.

<sup>9</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 79–93.

<sup>10</sup> About this battle, see M.-L. DERAT, 2002, 87–102.

<sup>11</sup> The text copied in the Däbrä Kärbe’s Gospel corresponds to pages 13 to 20 of Kurt Wendt’s edition (K. WENDT, 1962, 13–20). But in manuscript 91 of Conti Rossini’s collection, the beginning of the text is on page 93, and the end on page 81. For this reason, we can guess that the text was copied upside down. It is interesting to note that part of this text is very similar to a miracle of Mary published by E. CERULLI, 1933, 57–112. See also K. WENDT, 1962, IV note 15.

<sup>12</sup> K. WENDT, 1962, II–III. There is another extract from the *Mäṣḥafä Milad* in a manuscript of Däbrä Ḥayq (EMML 1835, cf. GETATCHEW HAILE & W. F. MACOMBER,

Of course, these different categories of documents are not clearly distinguishable in the manuscript. For example, assignments of land incomes are included with the *Šərʿatä Däbtära*.

Moreover, as has already been noted, since palaeographical observations are impossible, these texts can only be dated through internal criteria. The first letter written in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe is attributed to *ʿaqqabe säʿat* Amḥa Läṣəyon. According to Tadesse Tamrat, Amḥa Läṣəyon was in charge of the monastery in 1444/1445 and in 1480/1481<sup>13</sup>. Later on, another text seems to have been added in the Gospel. It refers not only to Amḥa Läṣəyon<sup>14</sup> but also to the king Zärʿa Yaʿəqob (1434–1468) and to Gäbrä Krəstos. Gäbrä Krəstos was the second *ʿaqqabe säʿat* in charge in Ḥayq monastery during the reign of king Zärʿa Yaʿəqob. He held this office when Amḥa Läṣəyon was living at the royal court in Däbrä Bərhan<sup>15</sup>. These historical references are very compelling. The allusion to the sharing of the office of *ʿaqqabe säʿat* between Amḥa Läṣəyon and Gäbrä Krəstos is so rare that we can assume that those texts are authentic and date from the mid-XV<sup>th</sup> century.

The relationship between Däbrä Kärbe and the royal court continues throughout the XV<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. Some documents actually refer to *ʿaqqabe säʿat* Nägädä Iyäsus, who was in charge during the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540), killed in 1534, and one of these texts contains the date of the 180<sup>th</sup> year of mercy, equivalent to our 1525/26<sup>16</sup>.

The Däbrä Kärbe Gospel was no doubt included in the archives of the monastery from the reign of Zärʿa Yaʿəqob until the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl. But we do not know whether the texts copied for Carlo Conti Rossini were the originals, or a secondary copy, as in the case of the production of a new manuscript of the Gospel. The only clue is given by Carlo Conti Rossini himself who occasionally mentions that some documents are written by the same hand<sup>17</sup>, which probably means that the others are from different hands.

The documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel are very interesting since they show a correspondence between the royal court and this Tigre monastery. But the danger with this kind of document is to exaggerate their

1981, 322–323), which is a homily on the importance of the feasts in honour of the angels and Mary (K. WENDT, 1962, 20–21).

<sup>13</sup> TADDESSE TAMRAT, 1970, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.

<sup>15</sup> TADDESSE TAMRAT, 1970, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Mss. Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.

<sup>17</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 100.

historical importance. We can classify these texts in two different categories. On one hand, they could be seen as very ordinary acts and letters, issued from the royal court to the monasteries and that it was only through a fortunate preservation that this particular manuscript acquired its position, which might reflect something from the reality of the XV<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, we can assume that Däbrä Kärbe had close relations with the royal court, and that these documents have an exceptional status. In fact, I will try to show that the different texts of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel are relevant to these two categories.

### The correspondence between Däbrä Kärbe and the *‘aqqabe sä‘at*

Some of the documents preserved in the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel can be described as letters sent from the royal court to the monastery, and copied as a testimony in the most sacred book of the community, the Gospel<sup>18</sup>. This description is based on the text of the first document where *‘aqqabe sä‘at* Amḥa Läsəyon, upon hearing that some monks of the community of Däbrä Kärbe had broken their monastic vows of obedience, reminds them about the rules, and finishes his text with these words:

ወይጽሐፍዎ ፡ ለዝንቲ ፡ ከታብ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩን ፡ ሰምዐ ፡ በቅድመ ፡  
እግዚአብሔር ፡ ማእከሉ ፡ ወማእከሉከሙ ።<sup>19</sup>

May this message be written in the Gospel, so that it will be a testimony before God, between me and you.

Moreover, it seems that this letter came from the royal court. As was mentioned before, Amḥa Läsəyon spent many years at the court of king Zär‘a Ya‘əqob at Däbrä Bərhan<sup>20</sup>. In one of the documents of the Gospel, he is clearly linked with Zär‘a Ya‘əqob<sup>21</sup>. Above all, the copy of an extract of the *Mäṣḥafä Milad* in the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel offers a clue as to the origin of the letter. The *Mäṣḥafä Milad* was produced in the *scriptorium* of Zär‘a Ya‘əqob’s court<sup>22</sup>, especially the text copied in the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel, which celebrates the glorious victory of the king against Badlay in 1445. Thus there is a probability that the first letter and the extract of the

<sup>18</sup> Concerning this habit, see M. KROPP, 1989, 79–98; G. LUSINI, 1998, 5–16.

<sup>19</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 77.

<sup>20</sup> TADDESSE TAMRAT, 1970, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.

<sup>22</sup> J. PERRUCHON, 1893, 77–78 note 3.

*Mäṣḥafä Milad* were sent together to Däbrä Kärbe from the royal court, and more precisely from the royal *scriptorium*<sup>23</sup>.

The reason why Amḥa Läsəyon sent a message to the community of Däbrä Kärbe is clearly exposed in the letter:

ሰማዕኩ ፡ አኅ ፡ ከመቦ ፡ እምኔክሙ ፡ እለ ፡ ኢተሐውሩ ፡ በኅገ ፡ መነኮሳት ፡ እንዘ ፡ ትሰመዩ ፡ ደቂቀ ፡ ዚአየ ፡ ወትንብሩ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ገቢረክሙ ፡ አብይት ፡ ኅበ ፡ ሀለዋ ፡ አንስት ፡ ወካዕበ ፡ ትትመዩጡ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ደብረ ፡ መነኮሳት ።<sup>24</sup>.

I have heard that some of you do not follow the rule of the monks. Instead you are calling yourselves my children, you are living in the (secular) world, building houses near the residence of the women. Then you come back in the monastery.

Later on the basis of the first letter of Amḥa Läsəyon, *‘aqqabe sä‘at* Nägädä Iyäsus repeated the warning to the monks<sup>25</sup>. This implies both that a copy of this letter probably existed in the archives of the *‘aqqabe sä‘at*, and that, despite the threat of Amḥa Läsəyon, the monks of Däbrä Kärbe continued breaking the rules of their monastery, which are manifested through these letters and in the *Śar‘atä Däbtära*. As we have seen before, the monks must retire from the secular world, and live apart from women. The *Śar‘atä Däbtära* shows also that Däbrä Kärbe followed the ritual of the *Horologium*, as we can read that 47 priests are enumerated “for the prayer of the day and night hours”<sup>26</sup>. But according to the text, the *Śar‘atä Däbtära* of Däbrä Kärbe was established by king Zär‘a Ya‘əqob and *‘aqqabe sä‘at* Amḥa Läsəyon<sup>27</sup>. Is this rule a sign of the court’s attempt to impose the *Horologium* of Giyorgis of Sägla on the community of Däbrä Kärbe?<sup>28</sup>

Finally, these documents reveal how the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* of Ḥayq exercised control and authority over the monasteries of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. It seems that, with the support of the king, he sent messages

<sup>23</sup> This hypothesis is reinforced by a reference in the chronicle of Zär‘a Ya‘əqob, where we find: “Lorsqu’une affaire se présentait à lui, il appelait quelqu’un digne de confiance parmi ses moines, et l’envoyait là où il voulait, près ou loin” (cf. J. PERRUCHON, 1893, 7 and the revised translation of the chronicle by the late R. SCHNEIDER, 1990, 126).

<sup>24</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 77.

<sup>25</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 101.

<sup>27</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 101.

<sup>28</sup> This attempt is mentioned in other sources, cf. E. CERULLI, 1933, 127–128; C. CONTI ROSSINI and L. RICCI, 1965, 86–88, and met some opposition, cf. GETATCHEW HAILE, 1982, 71.

promptly to errant communities<sup>29</sup>. But also, he was able to lay down rules to the monks, as in the case of the *Horologium*, according to the religious policy of the king. This was probably the main task of the *‘aqqabe sä‘at*. So, we can assume that the letters sent to Däbrä Kärbe and the *Šar‘atä Däbtära* were not unique (though conservation has made them exceptional), but were representative of the way the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* was leading the monastic world.

### Privileged relations between Däbrä Kärbe and the royal court

However, these documents referred to a monastic community of Tigre, with whom the religious and secular powers had a special relationship. Two elements in the texts of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel raise problems of interpretation. One of the letters alludes to the rules of Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>äd which inspired king Zär‘a Ya‘əqob and *‘aqqabe sä‘at* Amḥa Läsəyon to draw up the Däbrä Kärbe’s rules, and, according to the land donations, it seems that the kings had a specific policy towards Däbrä Kärbe. In this section, we will try to solve these problems by answering two different questions. Was the monastery of Däbrä Kärbe a royal foundation? Was the royal power trying to control the Ewostathian movement through Däbrä Kärbe?

#### *A royal foundation?*

According to G. Villari<sup>30</sup>, Däbrä Kärbe was founded by king Zär‘a Ya‘əqob himself. This reference, probably based on oral tradition, is not enough to explain the particular interest the kings showed towards the community. But a second point has to be underlined. One of the letters asserts that the rules of Däbrä Kärbe were copied from the rules of Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>äd:

ጸሐፍኩ ፡ ወአውገዘኩ ፡ አነ ፡ ነገደ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አእሚርየ ፡ ዘከመ ፡  
 ሠርዑ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ወዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አምኝ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡ ለካህናተ ፡  
 ደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡ ከመ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ነጉድጓድ ፡<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately we do not know how the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* became aware of the situation in the monasteries. The information could have come from those high clergy who exercised regional authority, as Giyorgis of Sagla did in the XIV<sup>th</sup> century as *nəbura’əd* of Dammo (G. COLIN, 1987, 17 and *käḥnatä däbtära* (priest of the court, *ibid.* 13, 23). But there are many different possibilities, including the stay of Zär‘a Ya‘əqob in Aksum in the beginning of his reign (J. PERRUCHON, 1893, 49–50, 83; M.-L. DERAT, 2004, 211–212).

<sup>30</sup> G. VILLARI, 1938, 1442–1443.

<sup>31</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.



I have written and I have threatened of excommunication, I, Nägädä Iyäsus, *‘aqqabe sä‘at*, learning how our king Zär‘a Ya‘əqob and *‘aqqabe sä‘at* ‘Amḥa Läsəyon, made the rules for the priests of Däbrä Kärbe like (those) of Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad.

The identification of this Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad is not obvious. There are two possibilities. It could be Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad in Amḥära founded by Zär‘a Ya‘əqob as his future necropolis<sup>32</sup>. It could also be Ḥayq Eṣṭifanos, which is also called Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad<sup>33</sup>. The two choices are interesting, but the first is probably better. In one of the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel, the destination of the land incomes is actually mentioned. They are specifically assigned to the celebrations of the *täzkar* memory of the kings (Dawit, Yəṣḥaq, Zär‘a Ya‘əqob, Bä‘ədä Maryam, Eṣkənder, Na‘od).

ወካዕበ ፡ ሠርዐ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ተዝካረ ፡ እግዝእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ዘይትገበረ ፡ እምዓመት ፡ እስከ ፡ ዓመት ፡ ሿወጂ ፡ ወለተዝካረ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ወለተዝካረ ፡ ዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ ወለበዓላተ ፡ ወልድ ፡ ዓድ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ዘርእ ያዕቆብ ፡ ተዝካረ ፡ ያዘክሩ ፡ ወሀቢት ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ብእደ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ። ዓድ ፡ ከደኒ ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ እስክንድር ፡ ጳር ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ናኦድ ፡ ጳርያ ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ ዓድ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ እዝን ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ይስሓቅ ።<sup>34</sup>

And also, he ordered that 37 (feasts) would be celebrated for the *täzkar* (memory) of Our Lady Mary, from year to year, and for the *täzkar* of the kings and for the *täzkar* of *‘aqqabe sä‘at* and for the feasts of the Son.

‘Ad Zär‘ä Dawit for ḥaṣe Zär‘a Ya‘əqob. They will celebrate the *täzkar*. Wäḥabit for ḥaṣe Bä‘ədä Maryam; ‘Ad Kädäni for ḥaṣe Eṣkənder; Ḥär for ḥaṣe Na‘od<sup>35</sup>; Ṣärya for ḥaṣe Dawit; ‘Ad Nəguṣ Eṣg<sup>w</sup>a for ḥaṣe Yəṣḥaq.

We can assume that Däbrä Kärbe had a particular status in Tigre concerning the royal power. Its function was to celebrate the dynastic memory through the *täzkar* of the kings. For this reason, the link between Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad, the royal necropolis of Amḥära, and Däbrä Kärbe, the place of commemoration of the kings, is logical. The copy of the *Mäṣḥafä Milad*, dedicated to the victory of Zär‘a Ya‘əqob over Badlay in 1445, in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe is another indication that one of the tasks of this com-

<sup>32</sup> J. PERRUCHON, 1893, 86–87.

<sup>33</sup> S. KUR, 1965, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 101.

<sup>35</sup> Here, we follow the way Na‘od is written in the Conti Rossini’s manuscript, however it is not the usual transcription.

munity was to celebrate the memory of the kings. Even if Däbrä Kärbe was not a royal foundation, the monastery had a close relationship with the royal power since the reign of Zär<sup>ʾ</sup>a Ya<sup>ʿ</sup>əqob. Indeed the particular position of Däbrä Kärbe in the policy of Zär<sup>ʾ</sup>a Ya<sup>ʿ</sup>əqob could have been the beginning of the tradition that the monastery was a royal foundation.

*The control of the Ewoṣṥathian movement through Däbrä Kärbe*

The second question I would like to focus on is the link between Däbrä Kärbe and the Ewoṣṥathian movement. According to the *Liber Axumae*, the Zana region was given by king Ləbnä Dəngəl to Ɔawlos, the successor of *abba* Yonas<sup>36</sup>. In the *gädl* of *abba* Yonas, we learn that this saint took part in the Däbrä Məṭmaq council in 1450<sup>37</sup>, where the observance of the Sabbath was recognized as an orthodox practice, imposed on all the communities<sup>38</sup>. So, the community of Yonas (Ḃnda Abba Yonas) was a member of the Ewoṣṥathian movement, and in the beginning of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, the region of Zana, where Däbrä Kärbe was located, was under control of this community.

Moreover, recent documents published by Gianfrancesco Lusini show that this dependence of Zana upon Ḃnda Abba Yonas (Däbrä Ṣəge) had already begun during the reign of Zär<sup>ʾ</sup>a Ya<sup>ʿ</sup>əqob (1434–1468). According to a text preserved in the *Gädlä abba Yonas* in Däbrä Ṣəge, the king gave lands to the new monastery founded in 1455 and among these lands we find Debä Zana, which could partially identify with Zana<sup>39</sup>. So, it is clear that immediately after the council of Däbrä Məṭmaq, Zär<sup>ʾ</sup>a Ya<sup>ʿ</sup>əqob tried to control the communities of Tigre, through donations of lands. Zana was linked with the Ewoṣṥathian communities, which probably means that Däbrä Kärbe played a role in the controversy about the Sabbath. Däbrä Kärbe also received lands from the king Zär<sup>ʾ</sup>a Ya<sup>ʿ</sup>əqob. We can underline the similarity between Däbrä Ṣəge of *abba* Yonas and Däbrä Kärbe. Both of them were granted lands by the kings, and one of the communities (Däbrä Ṣəge) was clearly linked with the Ewoṣṥathian movement.

This idea of an attempt to control the monastic communities of Tigre, and especially Däbrä Kärbe, is reinforced by the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel. The *ʿaqqabe säʿat* asks the monks to observe the rule set by the king and these texts show how the monks pledged their allegiance to the king through the celebration of the *täzkar*.

<sup>36</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1910, 34.

<sup>37</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1903, 180, 256; G. LUSINI, 1993, 199.

<sup>38</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI and L. RICCI, 1965, 86–87.

<sup>39</sup> G. LUSINI, 1998, 22, 40–41.

Even if the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel seem to be purely practical documents, often sent to the monastic communities by the *‘aqqabe sä‘at*, they attest also to a specific interest taken by the royal power in this monastery. The king tried to exercise control over the Ewoṣṥathian movement, after the appeasement of the controversy on the Sabbath. The letters sent to Däbrä Kärbe show this control. Both *‘aqqabe sä‘at* and kings remind the monks of the monastic rules, they grant them lands, and they want them to pray for the memory of the royal dynasty.

This paper is a first study of the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel. Of course, because the story of the community of Däbrä Kärbe is still unknown, there are a lot of questions with no answers. The study of such texts is probably the most interesting way to find information about how the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* of Ḥayq exercised their authority over the monastic communities and the way in which the kings of Ethiopia, especially since the reign of Zär‘a Ya‘əqob, used the *‘aqqabe sä‘at* as intermediaries for their religious policy.

The monastery of Däbrä Kärbe was destroyed by the armies of Grañ in 1540<sup>40</sup>, but, according to the *Liber Axumae*, it was rebuilt later. In the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel, there is a land donation at the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century in which Däbrä Kärbe and the region of Zana are mentioned<sup>41</sup>, so this community was still in existence then. The main task now is to check the Gospel of the monastery.

### Gə‘əz text and translation

I will now summarize the content of the documents in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe from the notes of Carlo Conti Rossini, give the gə‘əz text and its translation. The text, as an historical document, is copied from the Conti Rossini manuscript with its faults<sup>42</sup>. This translation is a working document. Some passages are still obscure, particularly the one referring to the lands for the *täzkar* of the kings.

*Placed after the Gospel of Matthew and at the beginning of Mark, this letter is written on one damaged folio, but the writing is well preserved. No date or seal*<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> M. KROPP, 1988, 18.

<sup>41</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1910, 70–71.

<sup>42</sup> As it is a secondary copy, a correction of the text would add a new version to it without solving the problem of the original. Secondly, it is an historical study and as such, the language of the author, his faults, could be of more interest than a correction.

<sup>43</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 76.

እኤምሐክሙ ፡ አነ ፡ ዐቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አምኃ ፡ ለጽዮን ። ሰላም ፡ ለክሙ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ማኅበረ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ መነኮሳት ፡ እለ ፡ ሀሎክሙ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡ ሰላም ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ የሀሎ ፡ ምስሌክሙ ፡ ብኩሎ ፡ ጊዜ ፡ ወበኩሎ ፡ ሰዓት ። ወደረሰይክሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ትሐሩ ፡ በፍኖተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ በፍኖተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ፍኖተ ፡ ሕይወት ። ወያግኅሥክሙ ፡ እምፍኖተ ፡ ኃጢአት ፡ እንተ ፡ ትወስድ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ገሃነም ፡ ዘእሳት ፡ ወያብእክሙ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ዐቢይ ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ውስተ ፡ መንግሥቱ ፡ ሰማያዊት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ። ሰማዕኩ ፡ አነ ፡ ከመቦ ፡ እምኔክሙ ፡ እለ ፡ ኢተሐውሩ ፡ በኅገ ፡ መነኮሳት ፡ እንዘ ፡ ትሰመዩ ፡ ደቂቀ ፡ ዚአየ ፡ ወትኅብሩ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ገቢረክሙ ፡ አብያት ፡ ኅብ ፡ ሀለዋ ፡ አንስት ፡ ወካዕብ ፡ ትትመዩጡ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ደብረ ፡ መነኮሳት ። ወዐዲ ፡ ትሐውሩ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ወዘይገብር ፡ ከመዘ ፡ ለይሕድግ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ልማድ ፡ እኩየ ፡ ወይነሰሕ ፡ በእንት ፡ ዘቀዳሚ ፡ ኃጢአቱ ፡ ዐቢየ ፡ ንሰሓ ፡ ወይግበር ፡ በከመ ፡ አዘዘ ፡ ካህን ፡ ወለእመ ፡ ኢኅደገ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ልማድ ፡ ኢይግባእ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ወይጽሐፍዎ ፡ ለዝንቱ ፡ ክታብ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩን ፡ ሰምዐ ፡ በቅድመ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ማእከሉየ ፡ ወማእከሉክሙ ፡ ወኩልክሙ ፡ መነኮሳት ፡ እለ ፡ ታፈቅርዎ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ ወተሓውሩ ፡ በፍኖቱ ፡ ይባርክሙ ፡ በበረከቱ ፡ ወያብእክሙ ፡ ውስተ ፡ መንግሥቱ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ አሜን ።<sup>44</sup>

I, *‘aqqabe sä’at* Amḥa Läsəyon, greet you. Peace be with you all the community of holy monks who are living in Däbrä Kärbe. May the peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you, each day and at all times.

The Lord has appointed you to travel on the way of the Gospel, the road of life. He turns you away from the path of sin, that leads to the fires of hell, and Jesus, the great High Priest, will lead you into His kingdom of Heaven, for ever and ever, Amen.

I have heard that some of you do not follow the monastic rule. Instead you are calling yourselves my children, you are living in the (secular) world, building houses near the residence of the women. Then you return to the monastery of monks, and again you go back into the (secular) world.

He who behaves like this, may he renounce this bad habit, may he repent of his previous sin with great penitence and may he do as the priest ordered. If he does not renounce this habit, may he never return to the monastery.

May this message be written in the Gospel, so that it will be a testimony before God, between me and you. And all of you, monks who love the Lord and who go on His way, He will bless you and will let you enter into His kingdom, for ever, Amen.

<sup>44</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 77.

After the Gospel of Matthew and before Mark, there is the following document, which is a notification of *‘aqqabe sä’* at Nägädä Iyäsus. Five lines follow the erasure of the main part, which gives a list of lands attributed to the convent<sup>45</sup>.

ጸሐፍኩ ፡ ወአውግዝኩ ፡ አነ ፡ ነገደ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አእሚርየ ፡ ዘከመ ፡  
ሠርዑ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ወዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አምኃ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡ ለካህናተ ፡  
ደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡ ከመ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ነገድንድ ፡ ከመ ፡ ኢይምጽአሙ ፡ ካልእ ፡ ግብረ ፡  
ዘእንበለ ፡ ግብረ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ዕጣን ፡ ወመሥዋዕት ፡ ወጸሎት ፡ ይትሐደግ ፡  
ዕዳ ፡ ነፍሰ ፡ በከመ ፡ ሠርዑ ፡ ቀዳሚ ፡ ኢይባእ ፡ ሥዩም ፡ ወአወፋሪ ፡ ወቃለ ፡ ነጋሲ ፡  
ወእመቦ ፡ ዘተዓደዎሙ ፡ ውጉዘ ፡ ለይኩን ፡ በአፈ ፡ ነቢያት ፡ ወሐዋርያት ፡ በአፈ ፡  
ጸድቃን ፡ ወሰማዕት ፡ በአፈ ፡ ትጉሃን ፡ መላእክት ፡ ወበአፋሃ ፡ ለእግዚአቲህ ፡ ማርያም ፡  
በአፈ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ውጉዘኒ ፡ ለይኩኑ ፡ በሰማይ ፡ ወበምድር ፡  
ለዓለመ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።  
ኅፋልቄ ፡ ምድራ ፡ ለቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ዘደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡ መስተርሲሐ ፤ ሰግል ፤  
ሰልበጥያ ፡ ሃፈጅ ፡ ሸጎፈ ፤ ጽራ ፤ ለገመድ ፤ አጽም ፤ ሰረብ ፤ ... በንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርአ ፡  
ያዕቆብ ፡ ለዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አምሐ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡ ወበዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ ገብረ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡  
በዓመተ ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ፻ ፡ ፹ ፡ ተጽሕፈ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ እመሂ ፡  
አውፋሪ ፡ ወእመሂ ፡ ሕዳግ ፡ ወበአፈ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ።<sup>46</sup>

I, Nägädä Iyäsus, *‘aqqabe sä’at*, have written and I have threatened excommunication, learning how our king Zär’a Ya’əqob and *‘aqqabe sä’at* Amḥa Läšəyon set the rules for the priests of Däbrä Kärbe like (those) of Däbrä Näg<sup>w</sup>ädg<sup>w</sup>ad, that no other charge except the service of the church, incense, sacrifice and prayer should fall to them. May the spirit renounce the sin, as has been prescribed before. Let no one enter, be he *śəyūm* or *awäfari* or *qalä nägasi*, and whoso violates this, may he be cursed by the mouth of the prophets and the apostles, by the mouth of the righteous and the martyrs, by the mouth of the vigilant angels, by the mouth of Our Lady Mary, by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May they be cursed in the sky and in the land, for ever and ever, amen.

This is the land of the church of Däbrä Kärbe: Mästärsihä, Sägl, Säl-bätya, Hafäḡ, Šägofä, Šəra, Lägämäd, Ašəm, Säräb ... (illegible text) With our king Zär’a Ya’əqob, for the *‘aqqabe sä’at* Amḥa Läšəyon and with the *‘aqqabe sä’at* Gäbrä Krəstos, this book was written in the 180<sup>th</sup> year of the grace (1528), saying: be he *awäfari* or *ḥədug*, (may he be cursed) by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>45</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 96.  
<sup>46</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 97.

The *Ṣərʿatä Däbtära* is written on the verso of a folio which is a piece of the index of the Gospel of Matthew. The folio is damaged. In the last six lines of this folio and the second folio, less wide than the others, there is an assignment of lands for different feasts. The last ten lines of the document are by another hand. On the verso of this folio, *Nägädä Iyäsus* and *Amḥa Läsəyon* assign lands for *Däbrä Kärbe*<sup>47</sup>.

ሥርዓተ ፡ ደብተራ ፡ ዘሠርዓ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ያዕቆብ ርቱዓ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡  
ወአቡነ ፡ አምኃ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡ ዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ ሥርዓተ ፡ ደብተራ ፡ ዘደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡  
ኖልቆ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ሿወጂ ፡ ለጸሎት ፡ ወለሰዓታት ፡ ዘሌሊት ፡ ወዘመዐልት ፡ በእንተ ፡  
መድኃኒተ ፡ ነፍሶሙ ፡ ቀጽራት ፡ ለግብረ ፡ ቅኔ ፡ ኀበ ፡ ሹመራጎት ፡ ኀበ ፡ ገብረ ፡  
ክርስቶስ ፡ ሠረቀ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ገብረ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ናዝራዊ ፡ ተንሥአ ፡  
ክርስቶስ ፡ ኪሮስ ፡ ናትናኤል ፡ በጸጋም ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ኖላዊ ፡ ፊልጶስ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡  
ዘርአ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ተክለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ዘአማኑኤል ፡ በየማን ፡ ኀበ ፡ ገብረ ፡ መድኃን ፡  
ማቴዎ ፡ ተንሥአ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ሰብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ሰዊሮስ ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡ ኢዩኤል ፡  
በየማን ፡ ገብረ ፡ መስቀል ፡ እንጦኒስ ፡ ተወልደ ፡ መድኃን ፡ ብኩረ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ኢሲይያስ ፡  
ጴጥሮስ ፡ እንድርያስ ፡ በጸጋም ፡ ኀበ ፡ አባ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ተሰብከ ፡ መድኃን ፡ ተስፋ ፡  
ሚካኤል ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ቶማስ ፡ መልከጼዴቅ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ሚልኪያስ ፡ ናትናኤል ፡ በየማን ፡  
ጼዋ ፡ ሥሉስ ፡ ማርቆሮኖስ ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ማርያም ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡  
ተንሥአ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ሰረቀ ፡ በርሃን ፡ ጸጋም ፡ ወካዕበ ፡ ሠርዐ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ተዝካረ ፡  
እግዚእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ዘይትገበረ ፡ እምዓመት ፡ እስከ ፡ ዓመት ፡ ሿወጂ ፡ ወለተዝካረ ፡  
ነገሥት ፡ ወለተዝካረ ፡ ዓቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ ወለበዓላተ ፡ ወልድ ፡ ጻድ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ዳዊት ፡  
ለሐጼ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ተዝካረ ፡ ያዘክሩ ፡ ወሀቢት ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ብእደ ፡ ማርያም ፡  
ዓድ ፡ ከደኒ ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ እስክንድር ፡ ጳር ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ናኦድ ፡ ጸርያ ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ዳዊት ፡  
ዓድ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ እዝን ፡ ለሐጼ ፡ ይስሐቅ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ከሎ ፡ ዘሄደ ፡ ወዘተአገለ ፡ ውጉዘ ፡  
ለይኩን ፡ በአፈ ፡ ነቢያት ፡ ወሐዋርያት ፡ በአፈ ፡ ጻድቃን ፡ ወሰማዕት ፡ ወበአፋሃ ፡  
ለእግዚእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ ንጽሕት ፡ እሱራን ፡ ይረሲክሙ ፡ እመሂ ፡ ሥዩም ፡  
ወእመሂ ፡ ደብተራ ፡ እመሂ ፡ አበው ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ ዓቢያን ፡ ወንኡሳን ፡  
ዘሠርዐ ፡ ዘሐይቅ ፡ አባ ፡ ቴዎዳሎስ ፡ ወወሀቡ ፡ እም ፡ ዴታ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይግበር ፡  
ተዝካረ ፡ ለአስተርእዮ ፡ እግዚእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ሿህሕብስት ፡ ሿሚስ ፡ ወጽሴዋ ፡  
ወለእመ ፡ አፅርአ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ውጉዘ ፡ ኩን ፡ በአፈ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡  
ወበአፋ ፡ ለእግዚእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ከመ ፡ ታፅርዐ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ተዝካረ ፡  
ጸሐፍኩ ፡ አነ ፡ ነገደ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ወአምሓ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡ አቃቤ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ አእሚርዮ ፡  
ዘከመ ፡ ሠርዐ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርአ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ርቱአ ፡ ሐይማኖት ፡ ከመ ፡ ኢትበአዱ ፡  
ወኢይትበአሱ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ሕንጻሃ ፡ ለቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ዘደብረ ፡ ከርቤ ፡ ጸሐፋ ፡  
እምባ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ገናዩ ፡ እምባ ፡ ፀር ፡ ጫላ ፡ ጭቅኝ ፡ ሕሎ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ገመድ ፡  
ክብርቶ ፡ ሺመል ፡ ገልባ ፡ ሳፅር ፡ ወንድቅ ፡ እምጻዕዳ ፡ ርቤ ፡ እስከ ፡ ጳር ፡ ኝር ፡  
ዘይቤ ፡ አደ ፡ አምሀራ ፡ አድ ፡ ዘረ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ ወምስለ ፡ እምባ ፡ ይደቃ ፡ ባህራ ፡ ወአድ ፡  
ጠፋኖት ፡<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 100.

<sup>48</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 101–103.

Rule for the *däbtära* [*Šar'atä Däbtära*] established by our king Zär'a Ya'əqob, the orthodox, and by our father Amḥa Läšəyon, *‘aqqabe sä'at*. Rule for the *däbtära* of Däbrä Kärbe.

Enumeration of the 47 priests for the service of the *qəne*, around three guides, for the prayer and the hours of the night and of the day, for the salvation of their soul. Around Gäbrä Krəstos: Šäräqä Bərhan, Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, Gäbrä Nazrawi, Tənsə'a Krəstos, Kiro, Natna'el, on the left. Abrəham Nolawi, Filḥos, Ʀawlos, Zär'a Krəstos, Təklä Maryam, Zä'amanu'el, on the right. Around Gäbrä Mädhən: Matewos, Tənsə'a Krəstos, Səbəhat Lä'ab, Säwiros, Əstifanos, Iyu'el, on the right. Gäbrä Məsqäl, Əntonis, Təwäldä Mädhən, Bək<sup>w</sup>ərə Šəyon, Isayyas, Ʀətros, Əndrəyas, on the left. Around *abba* Yoḥännəs, Təsäbkä Mädhən, Təsfa Mika'el, Zär'a Tomas, Mälkäsedeq, Yoḥännəs, Milkiyas, Natna'el, on the right. Šewa Šəllus, Marqoryos, Əstifanos, Gäbrä Maryam, Əstifanos, Tənsə'a Krəstos, Šäräqä Bərhan, on the left.

And also, he [the king] ordered that 37 (feasts) shall be celebrated for the *täzkar* of Our Lady Mary, from year to year, and for the *täzkar* of the kings and for the *täzkar* of the *‘aqqabe sä'at* and for the feasts of the Son.

‘Ad Zär'a Dawit for *ḥəše* Zär'a Ya'əqob. They will celebrate the *täzkar*. Wəhabit for *ḥəše* Bä'ədə Maryam; ‘Ad Kädäni for *ḥəše* Əskənder; Ʀär for *ḥəše* Na'od; Šärya for *ḥəše* Dawit; ‘Ad Nəguş Əzgwa for *ḥəše* Yəshaq.

Whose violates or infringes this all, may he be cursed by the mouth of the prophets and the apostles, by the mouth of the righteous and the martyrs and by the mouth of our Lady Mary, the pure Virgin. Be you *seyum* or *däbtära* or saint fathers, great (men) or little, you will be imprisoned.

Those who established this rule, *abba* Tewoglos of Ḥayq, gave 59 breads, 41 (measures) of mead and 60 (measures) of beer, in order to celebrate the *täzkar* of the apparition of Our Lady Mary. If they neglect this *täzkar*, may they be cursed by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by the mouth of Our Lady Mary.

I Nägädä Iyäsus, and Amḥa Läšəyon, *‘aqqabe sä'at*, have written, knowing what our king Zär'a Ya'əqob, the orthodox, had ordered, in order that they do not alter anything and do not quarrel concerning the building of the church of Däbrä Kärbe. (The lands): ʾƏmba with G<sup>w</sup>onayä, ʾƏmba Šärb, Čela Čəqəñ, Ḥelo with Gämäd, Kəbərto, Šimäl, Walka Sa'ər, Wändəq from Ša'əda Rəbe to Ʀär, Nər which is ʾAdä Amhara, ‘Ad Zär'a Dawit with ʾƏmba Yədəqa Bahəra and ‘Ad Ʀäfanot.

*On the third folio following the index of the Gospel of Matthew, there is a representation of Mark on the verso, and on the recto, twelve lines referring to the Šar'atä däbtära. The last part of the folio institutes the "tribute" due to Däbrä Kärbe's community by different lands, but the writing is illegible<sup>49</sup>.*

ሥርዓተ ፡ ደብተራ ፡ ዘሠርዐ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ወአቡነ ፡ አምኃ ፡ ለጽዮን ፡  
ቀጽራት ፡ ካህናት ፡ ለግብር ፡ ቅኔ ፡ ኅበ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ሠረቀ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ገብረ ፡  
መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ናዝራዊ ፡ ተንሥኦ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ኪሮስ ፡ ናትናኤል ፡  
በፀጋም ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ኖላዊ ፡ ፊልጶስ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ተክለ ፡ ማርያም ፡  
ዘአማኑኤል ፡ በየማን ፡ ኅበ ፡ ገብረ ፡ መድኅን ፡ ማቴዎስ ፡ ተንሥኦ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡  
ሰብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ሰዊሮስ ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡ ኢዩኤል ፡ በየማን ፡ ገብረ ፡ መስቀል ፡  
እንጦኒስ ፡ ተወልዶ ፡ መድኅን ፡ ብኩረ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ኢሳይያስ ፡ ጴጥሮስ ፡ ታዴዎስ ፡  
በፀጋም ፡ ኅበ ፡ አባ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ተሰብከ ፡ መድኅን ፡ ተሰፋ ፡ ሚካኤል ፡ ዘናጸይ ፡  
መልከዴዴቅ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ሚልክያስ ፡ ናትናኤል ፡ በየማን ፡ ዌዋ<sup>50</sup> ፡ ሥሉስ ፡  
ማርቆሮስ ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ማርያም ፡ እስጢፋኖስ ፡ ተንሥኦ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡  
በጸጋም ፡<sup>51</sup>

Rule for the *däbtära* established by our king Zär'a Ya'eqob and our father Amḥa Läṣəyon. The priests for the service of the *qəne* around Gäbrä Krəstos are on the left, Šäräqä Bərhan, Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, Gäbrä Nazrawi, Tänśə'a Krəstos, Kiros, Natna'el, on the left. Abrəham Nolawi, Filpos, Ṕawlos, Zär'a Krəstos, Täklä Maryam, Zä'amanu'el, on the right. Around Gäbrä Mädhən: Matewos, Tänśə'a Krəstos, Səbḥat Lä'ab, Säwiros, Əṣṭifanos, Iyu'el, on the right. Gäbrä Mäsqäl, Ənṭonis, Täwäldä Mädhən, Bək<sup>w</sup>ərə Şəyon, Isayyas, Ṕetros, Tadewos, on the left. Around *abba* Yoḥannəs, Täsäbkä Mädhən, Täsfa Mika'el, Zäna'əy, Mälkäşedeq, Yoḥannəs, Milkəyas, Natna'el, on the right. Şewa Şəllus, Marqoryos, Əṣṭifanos, Gäbrä Maryam, Əṣṭifanos, Tänśə'a Krəstos, on the left.

### Summary

One of the numerous manuscripts seen by C. Conti Rossini and copied for him deals with the monastery of Däbrä Kärbe, a religious community of Tigre. Some documents included in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe preserved traces of a correspondence between this community and the 'aqqabe sä'at of Ḥayq.

This correspondence is very interesting from a historical point of view. It is accepted that the community of Ḥayq headed the monastic clergy in Ethiopia approximately

<sup>49</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 100.

<sup>50</sup> Most probably as written in the third document.

<sup>51</sup> Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 103.



until the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. But, it was not known how the ‘*aqqabe sä’at*’ exercised control and authority over the monasteries, and what was his area of competence. These documents of Däbrä Kärbe give us a first answer to these questions.

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### Abbreviations

CSCO Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium